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NAOMI WENTWORTH

BY

ANNA MAY

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OR

"HE LEADETH ME."

A Love Story

BY

ANNA MAY. Smith

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2098 SULLIVANT AVE.,
COLUMBUS, OHIO

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I

The little New England village of S— was all aglow with the glory of the setting sun. A lonely traveler slowly wended his way along the quiet country road leading to the village. As he reached the summit of a hill and came in sight of the village, he stopped a moment to view the scene.

Spread out before him were green meadows, dotted here and there with patches of golden grain waiting to be gathered into the harvest. Just ahead of him was a bridge, and beneath it ran a sparkling, gurgling, mountain streamlet. As it reached the meadow it widened, and further down its waters turned the wheel of a mill which had done service many years. The traveler's gaze wandered slowly over the whole scene, and finally rested on an old stone church which stood some distance ahead of him. Old and moss grown, almost covered with ivy, it stood by the roadside just as it had stood for perhaps a century past. Further along was the village, and beyond it the green hills rose in majestic splendor. Kissed as they were by the rays of the setting sun, they added much beauty to the scene. As he neared the church he slackened his pace to view the village churchyard. The graves were for the most part marked with plain

marble slabs. Some, like the church, were old and moss-grown, others were new and white. Here and there a stately monument lifted its head high above its fellows. They, however, spoke not of holier lives or nobler deeds, but rather of worldly store. On the other side of the church was a cottage which nestled closely in its protecting shadow, and which he rightly conjectured was the parsonage. A little further on, on the opposite side of the road, was another cottage—Rose cottage, it was called. The path leading to it was lined with roses, and climbing rose vines almost hid the broad veranda from view. The air was heavy with their perfume, which told plainly that is was June-time—the month of roses.

As the traveler neared this cottage he stopped, put his hand to his ear as if to listen, then turned and retraced his steps to the church. Looking about him to see whether or not he was watched, he entered noiselessly and concealed himself in the shadow of a huge pillar which stood near the doorway. At the organ was a woman singing; and the words which came to him were:—

"Lord, I would clasp Thy hand in mine,
Nor ever murmur, nor repine,
Content, whatever lot I see,
Since 'tis my God that leadeth me!

"And when my task on earth is done,
When, by thy grace, the victory's won,
E'en death's cold wave I will not flee,
Since God through Jordan leadeth me."

A stray sunbeam stealing through a western window fell on her, revealing a well poised head set on shapely shoulders. Her hair, which was dark brown, hung in a massive braid at her back. By this her watcher guessed that she was yet young. As she arose and started toward him he drew closer into the shadow lest he might be discovered.

"Innocence personified!" was his thought as he watched her coming down the aisle.

She wore a light muslin frock which barely reached her ankles; her hair was brushed loosely back from a forehead that was too high to be called beautiful, and her full round chin showed a positive and determined nature, softened somewhat by lips that were tender and sensitive. Her large brown eyes looked what they were—the windows of an innocent soul. In one hand she carried her large sun hat which she had converted into a rose basket and filled with June's offering. At the steps she lingered a moment to watch the sunset.

"What a splendid sunset," she murmured; "if only that great, black cloud had not floated there. It has, however, not a silver, but a golden lining. George

says it is just so with our lives; the clouds often appear, but back of them all God's glorious presence is ever shining. I wonder why it is some lives are so full of sorrow. My life is so happy, I wonder if the clouds will ever come. But mamma will be wanting me, and I must not linger even to watch the sunset."

She tripped lightly down the steps and went in the direction of the cottage on the other side of the road.

"She was watching the sunset," mused the stranger, as he emerged from his hiding place; "and no wonder, for it is a beautiful scene. Some day I'll paint it."

A man coming from Rose cottage met the girl at the gate.

"I'm so glad you've been here, George; I've been away longer than I intended, and mamma would have been lonely," he heard her say as the two met.

"Your mother and I have had a pleasant visit, but she is wondering why you do not come."

"Then I'll go at once," she said, and started up the rose path.

The man lifted his hat politely to the stranger as he passed and went in the direction of the church. "How lonely my life is," he murmured, as he reached the gate leading to the cottage by the church. Turning, he cast a longing glance in the direction of the

other cottage and whispered, " Dare I hope that it will ever be otherwise."

Let us take a closer look at him as he stands by the gate.

George Raymond was a man of perhaps thirty-five; his hair, which had been brown, was now plentifully streaked with gray; there was a slight stoop in his shoulders which was due, doubtless, to his habit of stooping at his desk. His eyes were gray. His was not a handsome face, and yet, withal, he had a goodly countenance, a face one instinctively trusts. He was, as his father had been before him, the shepherd of the little flock at S— —, and a good shepherd he had proved himself to be. Father, mother, sister,—all three lay in the churchyard, and he was left alone.

II.

"Is that you, Naomi," called Mrs. Wentworth through the window, as she heard footsteps on the veranda.

"Yes, mamma, I've come at last," she answered, as she entered the room and greeted her mother with a kiss. "I stopped at the church to practice a hymn we are to sing next Sabbath and that made me late getting home."

"I heard you singing in the church. That hymn is a favorite of mine, sing it for me now, please."

Naomi went to the piano and sang in a clear, sweet voice,—

"He leadeth me! O blessed thought!
O words with heavenly comfort fraught!
Whate'er I do, where'er I be,
Still 'tis God's hand that leadeth me.

"Sometimes 'mid scenes of deepest gloom,
Sometimes where Eden's bowers bloom,
By waters still, o'er troubled sea,—
Still 'tis his hand that leadeth me!

"Lord, I would clasp thy hand in mine,
Nor ever murmur nor repine,
Content, whatever lot I see,
Since 'tis my God that leadeth me!

"And when my task on earth is done,
When, by thy grace, the victory's won,
E'en death's cold wave I will not flee,
Since God through Jordan leadeth me."

"Now come sit by me, Naomi, I want to talk to you."

Naomi took her accustomed place on a low stool at her mother's feet. A glance at the two faces was sufficient to tell that they were mother and daughter, for they were strangely alike, and yet so different. The one was thin and pale, and told of much suffering; the other was fresh with the bloom of youth and health.

Mrs. Wentworth was a widow. Naomi, her only child, had but a faint recollection of her father, as he died while she was yet in her infancy. The only other member of the household was Janet Thomas, a faithful and trusted servant who had been with them since Naomi first saw the light of day.

"George was here while you were gone, and we were talking of you, Naomi," said Mrs. Wentworth when Naomi had seated herself.

"'Of me, mamma! Have I been doing something naughty that George has come to tell you about?'" and she smiled as she said the words.

"No, my child, it is not that. George Raymond loves you, Naomi, and wants you for his wife."

"Loves me—wants me for his wife! Why, mamma, I never thought of him in that way, and what would you do without me?"

"Ah! my child, it is of that also that I wish to speak to you. Sometimes I feel that I will not be with you much longer."

As the meaning of her mother's words dawned upon her great tears welled in Naomi's eyes.

"Mamma, tell me you do not mean it! I could not live without you!"

"It grieves me to give you pain, Naomi, but it is better that you should know. The parting will be hard, but sometimes I grow homesick and long for loved ones on the other shore. You just sang, 'He Leadeth Me.' Let it be your motto through life, Naomi. He will not always lead you in pleasant paths; it will sometimes be by troubled seas. Trials are sure to come, but if you'll only trust Him He will lead you at last by the still waters. Promise me, my child, that you'll try to be content no matter where He leads you."

"I'll try, mamma, but it will be so hard if you are taken from me!" And she buried her face in her

mother's lap and sobbed bitterly. Naomi had grown so accustomed to her mother's pale face, and their companionship had been so sweet, that she had not thought that it must some day be otherwise. Mrs. Wentworth was one of those patient, silent sufferers whose very presence is a benediction to those about them. Naomi had never heard her utter one word of complaint..

"Let us go back to the beginning of our conversation," said Mrs. Wentworth, when Naomi's grief had somewhat spent itself. "I told you George Raymond loved you and wanted you for his wife. Do you think you could love him, Naomi?"

"I do love him, I have always loved him, mamma, but not in that way."

"He will take no promise from you till you have seen enough of the world to know whether or not you would be happy as his wife. I do not urge it upon you Naomi; God forbid that I should do aught to mar my daughter's happiness; but if there is no other, remember I would not wish it otherwise. Whether or no you are ever George Raymond's wife, always trust him as your friend, for he will be a true friend to you, come what will.

"It is getting late, so let us say good night."

Naomi kissed her mother a fond good night and went to her room, where she soon sobbed herself to sleep.

III

Loud knocking sounded at the parsonage door.

"Who's there?" called George Raymond from his window. It was Janet who answered.

"Oh! Mr. Raymond, come quick, Mrs Wentworth is dying!" No need to urge George Raymond to make haste. Hastily robing himself he aroused Mrs. Lawrence, his housekeeper, and her husband, dispatched Mr. Lawrence for the doctor and told Mrs. Lawrence to follow him.

He found Naomi weeping by her mother's bedside. A glance told him that the end was near. As he reached the bedside Mrs. Wentworth opened her eyes, and, seeing who it was, said:

"It has come sooner than I thought, George."

Naomi, hearing her mother's voice, looked up.

"Farewell, my child," she whispered, and was dead.

"Oh! my mother! speak to me!" cried Naomi, when she realized what had occurred.

After some moments George lifted the prostrate form tenderly in his arms and carried her to a seat on the veranda. How often in after years did Naomi, in memory, live over again that hour. The first gray streaks of morn were just beginning to show them-

selves in the eastern sky. Rain was gently falling, keeping time it seemed to Naomi to her throbbing heart. Now and then from the neighboring barnyards came the hoarse cry of some cock proclaiming the break of day. But above all was the wail of a breaking heart. George Raymond knew that words would be useless, so kept silent, and mingled his tears with hers.

Janet's grief was scarcely less affecting than was Naomi's. She had loved her mistress well, and had repeatedly refused to leave her although often urged to do so by John Thornton. He was the good and honest miller at the old mill which stood on the banks of the stream in the meadow.

Kind friends came to perform the last sad offices for the dead, and when Naomi again saw her mother she was lying, silent and peaceful, in the same room where the evening before she had told her child the parting was not far off. Three days later they laid her in the churchyard, and no longer did she grow homesick or long for loved ones on the other shore.

The summer passed slowly away; autumn with its garments of gold and crimson had come. Time had softened Naomi's grief, and she was beginning to take up her old life again. Almost every day found her somewhere, reading to some dear, old grandmother, or, perhaps, singing by the bedside of some weary sufferer. She often accompanied George on his pas-

toral calls. It was one evening as they were returning home that Naomi broached a subject that had long lain near her heart.

It had been one of her fondest dreams that she might some day study music under one of the great masters. She and her mother had often talked and planned about it.

"You know, George," she said, "how I love music, and how I have longed to know it better. I have been wondering lately if I could not get something to do in Boston to help pay my way and still have time to study under some good teacher. I might be a governess. What do you think of it George?"

"Before we talk further of this, Naomi, I want to ask you a question. Let us sit here in the shade of this tree while we talk," he said, leading the way to a large elm which stood by the roadside.

"Did your mother tell you the evening before her death of a conversation we had that evening?" A slight blush overspread her face as she answered in the affirmative.

"Then you know of my great love for you; may I hope that you will some day return it, Naomi?"

"I don't know, George; I will answer you just as I did mamma: I do love you, I believe I have always loved you, but not in that way. Maybe, sometime, when I'm older, I'll love you in the way you want me to."

"I promised your mother I would not urge you, or bind you by any promise until you know whether or not you would be happy as my wife. I don't know when I first learned to love you, Naomi; I think it was when I was a mere college lad. I remember when I first saw you as well as though it were but yesterday. I was home to spend the holidays, and mother told me Mrs. Wentworth had a Christmas gift for me. Mother and I went over that evening. Mother went to the bed and brought forth a great bundle of shawls and blankets, and in them was a wee baby.

"Here's your Christmas gift, George," she said, as she laid you in my arms.

"My heart went out to you then, Naomi, and now you have so grown into my life that I want you for my very own."

"You have been a true friend to me, I never can repay you. Maybe some day I will be your wife, but now my soul longs for music."

"And your longing shall not be in vain. You say you would like to go to Boston; I will see at once what we can do about it." This, he thought, would give her a chance to know the world better. He would trust to her true, womanly instinct to separate the gold from the dross in life.

"I will not be selfish," he thought; "perhaps it is wrong of me, anyway, to want her for my wife, when there is such a disparity in our years."

IV.

When Naomi reached home she found tea waiting, and Janet somewhat uneasy over her long absence. She longed to tell that good soul of her plans, and of the plans she had made for her, but concluded to wait till they had assumed more definite shape. When they met the next day George told her he was to go to Boston on the morrow.

"It is good of you, George," she answered, but could hardly feel happy when she noted the look of pain in his eyes. He was away four days, and long ones they were to Naomi. When he returned he found her in the churchyard beside her mother's grave. Seating himself on the rustic seat beside her, he told her of the arrangements he had made for her.

"I have a friend in Boston whose sister will give you a home, and in return you will teach her little girl music. It will not require much of your time, so you will have ample time for your own study. I have arranged for you to study under Professor Burton. Do the arrangements suit you, Naomi?"

"Nothing could please me better."

"I'm glad you are pleased."

"I must go tell Janet," she said, and started for home.

"O Janet, come here!" she called, as she entered the doorway.

Janet, ever ready to do Naomi's bidding, was by her side in a moment.

"Janet, I am going to leave you and the old home for a while, I—"

"Leave me! what do you mean Naomi?"

"I mean that I am going to Boston to study music. What will you do when I am gone, Janet?"

"Well, if you don't need me any more John and I will be married," Janet blushingly replied.

"Just what I have planned for you! I verily believe you have stayed single all these years just because we needed you; but you must marry now and live here at the old home."

"Keep everything just as it is, Janet, so when I come back it will be home to me still."

"When are you going, Naomi?"

"That depends largely on when you are married; of course I want to see you married before I go."

The next few weeks were busy ones for both Janet and Naomi, but at the end of the fourth everything was in readiness, and two hearts that had long been joined in love were joined in holy wedlock.

Naomi went to Boston the day following.

"I hate to leave you, George," she said as they drove to the station. "You will be lonely without me, wont you?"

"Yes, I will be lonely; but do not think of that. You know how dearly I love you, and how I long to have you for my own, but I seek your happiness rather than mine, so will not be selfish. Remember you are bound to me by no promise. Should another cross your pathway with whom you could be happier than with me, forget that I ever loved you except as a friend. I know you would not choose unwisely. But if there is no other, come to me when you will, my arms will always be open to receive you."

They reached the station none too soon, for the train was there already. He watched her little white hand wave him farewell from the window of the moving train, then turned his horse's head homeward. Life would indeed be lonely for him now that Naomi was gone. Never since his college days were over had they been separated for more than a few days at a time. He had been the sharer of all her childish joys and sorrows; often had he kissed away her tears and brought sunshine again to her face. And when childhood had passed and great sorrow had come, he had tried to comfort her still.

V

A week had passed. Guests thronged the attractive home of the Clayton's, and Naomi Wentworth sat at the piano playing. She had begged to be allowed to remain quietly in her room, but Mrs. Clayton asked her so earnestly to play that she had consented. She wore a simple mourning gown, and a single white rose on her bosom was all that relieved its sombreness.

Among the late arrivals was a young man who was faultlessly attired, and whose general appearance was that of a typical society gentleman.

Arthur Bevington was the son of wealthy and doting parents. He was courted and petted by all the mammas who had marriageable daughters, and the young ladies themselves always wore their sweetest smiles for him. He laughed and flirted with all alike, but not a serious thought had ever entered his mind.

He found a seat beside a young lady, but did not prove a very congenial companion, as she soon let him know.

"Miss Wentworth seems quite attractive to you, Mr. Bevington," she laughingly said, as she noted his continued glance toward Naomi.

"Miss Wentworth, did you say? I have not had

the honor of meeting her. She was singing as I came in, and I thought she had a very good voice."

"She sings and plays beautifully, and seems quite young, too."

"Wentworth-Wentworth, surely I have seen her somewhere. Ah! I believe I have it now; can it be possible! Well, I'll find out, anyway."

As soon as opportunity offered he sought his hostess and asked to be introduced to Miss Wentworth.

"Of course you must meet her, Arthur," she replied. "You know she is staying with us now, is here studying music."

"Indeed! I did not know it. I presume then I shall see her often." Many eyes followed Arthur Bevington as Mrs. Clayton led him toward Naomi. He studied her closely as they conversed after Mrs. Clayton left them. and smiled complacently when the conversation drifted to music—the theme Naomi loved so well.

"I like to hear you sing, Miss Wentworth; you sing sacred music, also, do you not?"

"Yes, I sing sacred music more than any other kind," she replied.

"Then sing for me. You see they have all deserted us; have gone into the grounds to enjoy the moonlight, for the evening is a rare one for the time of year. Sing, 'He Leadeth Me,' it is a favorite of mine."

"What a strange request for one like him to make," she thought, as he led her to the piano.

"Thank you; I shall always like that hymn," he said, when she had finished.

"To me it is sad," she replied.

"Come now, let us walk in the moonlight and I'll tell you why I like it." They walked till they reached a seat beneath a clump of lilac bushes in a sequestered part of the grounds. It was while seated there that she listened to his story:

"Some months ago I was in the country on a sketching tour. One evening as I was passing an old church I heard music and went in. A young girl was at the organ, and she was singing that hymn.

"Somehow I have had a strange fancy for it ever since. I passed by the church again the next evening but no sweet voiced singer was there. You know now why I like it; tell me why you think it sad."

"My mother died that night."

"I was right then in thinking it was you whom I saw in the church that evening. But forgive me, Miss Wentworth, for recalling to you sad memories."

"There is nothing to forgive; although they are sad memories yet they are sweet. I love to think of my mother."

"I am glad we have met, and I hope we will be friends. Mrs. Clayton tells me this is your home for

the present, so we are likely to meet often, as I come here frequently.''

''Say, old boy, however did you come across that little angel?'' asked Arthur Bevington of his host, as they were enjoying their cigars after the other guests had departed.

Mr. Clayton smiled faintly at the comparison, but his tone was serious as he answered: ''She is an angel, indeed; but mind, Arthur, none of your confounded flirting with her, do you understand?''

Arthur laughed lightly.

''Yes, I understand; but you can trust me there, Clayton; I'd as soon think of flirting with the Madonna herself, were she here.''

After a week spent in her new home Naomi found it all that could be desired. Her pupil, Beatrice Clayton, she found to be a vivacious, impulsive, self-willed child of ten. She gave her no serious trouble, however, as the two seemed mutually drawn to each other from the first.

The winter passed quickly away. Professor Burton, Naomi's teacher, was the leader of the choir of one of Boston's leading churches, and he, recognizing the rare quality of Naomi's voice, insisted that she should take a place in the choir.

So absorbed was she in her music that she gave little thought to aught else. George and Janet grew somewhat jealous as her letters to them were often cut

short on account of it. About the only recreation she allowed herself was the time spent in Arthur Bevington's company. He came more often than ever to the Clayton home, and even went occasionally to the church where Naomi sang—a thing he had not often done before. His apparent devotion to her caused Mrs. Clayton not a little uneasiness.

"I do wonder if Arthur is serious with Naomi?" she asked her husband one day.

"If he trifles with that girl's affection he may consider this house closed to him forever! I warned him against it when she first came."

That Arthur Bevington was in love there was little doubt. It was a strange, new experience for him. Naomi was so unlike other girls, that he hesitated to tell her of his love. He must make sure that he was loved in return.

It was one evening in the blossoming springtime as they were gathering lilacs from the bushes under whose branches their friendship began, that she listened to the story of love as it fell from Arthur Bevington's lips.

"I cannot answer you tonight, Arthur," she said; "but meet me here tomorrow evening and you shall have your answer."

"Father, lead me," she prayed, as she knelt that night by her bedside. And who will say that he did not lead her?

When at last her eyelids closed in slumber, it was to dream, not of Arthur Bevington, but of honest, loving George Raymond.

Never had a day seemed so long to Arthur as the one which followed. The gathering twilight found him approaching the lilacs. Naomi was already there, her guitar lying idly in her lap, and so lost in thought that she did not notice his approach.

"I have come for my answer, Naomi," he said, throwing himself on the grass at her feet.

"Arthur, I—I cannot be your wife."

"Do not jest with me, Naomi; surely you cannot mean what you say?"

"I am not jesting; I mean I can never be your wife."

"Tell me, Naomi, is there another?"

"Yes."

"And that other is"—

"George Raymond," she said, finishing the sentence for him.

"Naomi Wentworth, you are a flirt! a heartless flirt! Why are your lips ever ready to smile at my coming, why do your eyes always bid me welcome? You do love me, Naomi, you cannot deny it."

"You accuse me wrongly, you do not understand; listen and I will explain:

"I am not bound to George Raymond by any promise. He loves me and wants me for his wife; but

owing to the disparity in our ages has left me free to choose another if I wish. But I promised my dying mother that God should be my leader, and he does not lead me to share your gay, useless life. Our lives are so different, Arthur, we would not be happy together. If I have wronged you forgive me, for I meant no wrong."

Never had Arthur Bevington realized his utter uselessness as he did at that moment. He knew that he was unworthy of her, as he also knew that it would be useless to further urge his suit. The anger had all died out of his voice when he said:

"I have but one request to make of you, Naomi; let me hear you sing that hymn once more."

She picked up her guitar which had fallen to the ground. Her voice trembled a little as she began, but ere she had reached the second stanza it rose clear and steady, she, seemingly forgetting that anyone was near save her God. When she had finished, and her hand lay still on the guitar, he stooped and lifted it to his lips.

"Farewell, my only love," he murmured, and was gone.

As Naomi watched him depart she felt that he was taking a part of her life with him, but knew not what it was.

VI.

"You're taking more than is good for you, Bevington," protested one of his companions at the club, as Arthur handed his glass to the waiter to be refilled for the third or fourth time.

"Mind your own business, I can take care of myself," he retorted, angrily. After draining the glass to the dregs he strode out of the room.

Two days later found Naomi going back to her old home, and the E—, a ship which sailed that day for India, carried with it Arthur Bevington.

"Janet! Janet!" called a voice in the hallway at Rose cottage.

"Bless the child! I'd know her voice among a thousand," exclaimed Janet as she arose from the strawberry bed where she was gathering the luscious fruit, and hastened into the house to welcome her darling home.

"Did you walk from the station? Why didn't you send us word so we could meet you?" asked Janet, when the first greetings were over.

"I wanted to surprise you, and besides I enjoyed the walk very much."

"Wont John be surprised though. Only this

morning he was wishing you were here to help us eat strawberries."

"Well, since he is so anxious for me to have some I'll take some now," she replied, laughingly. Janet went to fetch some cream, and Naomi sat down to a feast fit for any queen. When she had finished she went to the door leading to the kitchen garden.

"You have kept my charge faithfully, Janet; everything looks as though it were but yesterday that I left it."

A moment later, Janet, looking through the kitchen window, saw her going in the direction of the churchyard and knew that she had gone to commune with her dead. George Raymond saw her coming and longed to go to her at once, but constrained himself a little while so that her first moments at her parent's graves might be in solitude.

"Naomi!"

She turned at the sound of George's voice and held both her hands to him in greeting. Seeing a look in her eyes which gave him hope he asked:

"Has my little girl come home to make me happy?"

"Yes," she answered, and was folded to his bosom, and received from his lips their betrothal kiss. With his strong arms about her Naomi felt that she had at last found a shelter from the tempest which

had been threatening her, and not for a moment did she regret her choice.

"When shall it be, Naomi?" he asked.

After studying a moment she replied, "I will be your Christmas gift, George."

"Not till December, and this is only May."

"December and May," she repeated, musingly. The words had struck her strangely.

"That's what people will say of our union, George; you are December, and I am May."

"And do you mind?" he asked, a pained look in his eyes.

"No;" she answered, and he was satisfied.

While seated there beside her mother's grave she told him the story of her life as it had been since she last saw him. She concealed nothing, not even that she had been tempted for a little while to choose another.

Naomi's return to S— made glad many hearts; and when they learned that she was to be George Raymond's wife and would not leave them again, their joy knew no bounds. Some, it is true, shook their heads and said it wasn't the thing, but they all loved George, and had they looked everywhere for him a wife they could have found no one but Naomi whom they considered good enough for him.

It was the evening of that first day at home.

Naomi had been singing for George. She left the piano and seated herself at his feet.

"Somehow, George, I cannot help thinking of mamma tonight, and of that last evening we spent together. She sat just where you are now, and I was at her feet. How I long for her tonight, to receive her blessing. She would be happy if she knew, for although she did not urge me to be your wife, she said she would not wish it otherwise."

A sudden idea siezed her. She sqrang up, and taking him by the hand said:

"Come with me."

She led him through the hall and out on to the kitchen porch where she knew she would find Janet. Putting her arms about her she said:

"Janet, you are all the mother I have now, so we have come to receive your blessing on this our betrothal night."

Janet did not look nearly so surprised as Naomi had thought she would when she first learned of her engagement.

"Well! Well! I have thought for a long time that you two were intended for each other, and I have often wondered if you would ever find it out. Were I your own mother I could not say, God bless you more earnestly."

George and Naomi dropped naturally into their old habits, and life went on for them much as it had

in the old days. The months spent in Boston grew gradually to seem like a mere dream to Naomi.

Another summer soon passed away, and the rustle of the falling leaves reminded Naomi that Christmas, the time she had promised to be George Raymond's bride, would soon be at hand.

It was a beautiful October morning. A nutting party had been planned for the day, and Naomi stood at the gate awaiting George, who had promised to be on hand early, as they were to go to the village to join the crowd there. Instead of George she saw Mr. Lawrence coming toward her. A feeling of fear stole over her, was it a premonition of coming evil? She started toward him.

"Mr. Raymond wishes you to come to him, Naomi," he said, when they met.

Naomi found George lying on the couch.

"What is it, George?" she asked kneeling beside him and imprinting a kiss upon his brow.

"I was taken ill last night and find this morning that I am unable to go nutting with you."

"Go with me! and do you think I am going without you?"

"I had rather you would; they will be disappointed if you do not."

"And I had rather stay. No, George, my place is here. There would be no enjoyment for me while

you are lying here. Mr. Lawrence must go and tell them we are not coming."

"Let it be as you wish; but if you stay I guess I'll have to put you to work on a sermon for next Sababth."

"Me write a sermon? ha! ha! Well, just wait till I find Mr. Lawrence;" and she went in search of him to dispatch him to the village.

"What is the text?" she asked, seating herself at the writing desk when she returned.

"I haven't chosen it yet; perhaps we had better select a short one."

"Then I suppose it will be 'Jesus wept.' "

"Short texts do not always make short sermons. A whole volume of sermons might be written on those two words. How I love that verse; I think it brings our Savior nearer to us than any other verse in the Book. How sweet it is to know when sorrows come that he looks down and sympathizes with us. A dreary world this would be sometimes were it not for sympathy, even the sympathy of earthly friends."

"Yes, I know that is true. I believe after mamma died that I should always have doubted God's justice had it not been for your counsel and sympathy. It seemed cruel of God to take her when she was all I had. As I looked at your life, knowing that you had passed through the same sorrow and yet trusted in

God's wisdom, it gave me strength to bear it. But how about the sermon? I haven't written a word of it yet."

"Never mind the sermon now; get a book and read to me."

She selected a book that was none too interesting, and when, an hour later, she laid it aside and went to him, it was to find him fast asleep as she had hoped. She slipped quietly away, and when she came again in the evening, found him much better. In a few days he was able to go about his work.

November came and went, and preparations for the wedding were begun. Had they consulted their own wishes it would have been as simple and quiet as possible; but knowing that many would be disappointed were they not bidden they laid aside their own wishes to please others, and arranged for the marriage to take place in the church on Christmas morning.

VII

It was Christmas eve. George and Naomi were busy in the church with the decorations of evergreens. When the last touch had been added to their work they went to the doorway to obtain a better view of it. "Only a few more hours, and you will be mine forever," he said, as he drew her to his side. "How often have I dreamed of the time that is now so near. For years it has been my wish that you might some day be my wife; and now what more have I to wish for? Was there ever such happiness as mine, I wonder?"

He gasped, put his hand to his side and fell at her feet. A piercing cry rang through the church. Mr. Lawrence, who was working near, heard it and ran to see what it meant. He found George lying on the floor, unconscious, with Naomi bending over him. Lifting him in his strong arms he carried him to the house, while Naomi mechanically followed. Mrs. Lawrence applied restoratives while Mr. Lawrence hastened for the doctor.

"It is just as I have feared," said good old doctor Lee when he heard what had occurred. "His joy has proved too much for him, and I'm afraid we will have hard work to bring him through."

After an hour of faithful work they were rewarded by seeing George open his eyes. Naomi had looked on through it all in silence; speech seemed to have utterly forsaken her. But when she saw his eyes open she uttered a glad cry and ran and knelt at his side. The doctor stayed with him that night and far into the next day. When he had gone George asked for Naomi. When she seated herself by the bedside he took her hand in his, and said: "Naomi, my dear little girl, you have passed through great sorrow, are you strong enough to bear more?"

"What do you mean?" she asked, a startled look upon her face.

"I mean—I mean that I am going away."

"Where are you going, George? Why cannot I go with you?"

"You cannot go with me now, but after a little while you can come to me—and your mother."

She understood now, but did not speak for some moments. When she spoke it was in slow, measured tones.

"George," she said, "you have always taught me that God is just and merciful. What have I done that He should do this thing and call it justice? I cannot believe that He will take you from me. The doctor does not know. Try to live for my sake."

"I would to God that I might, but I fear the

doctor is right. I know I have given you pain, but it is better than that it should come to you suddenly."

"If you go I want to go, too; that would be mercy."

"Oh, my poor little girl! your lot is indeed a hard one. I could almost echo your wish that you might go with me. We cannot understand God's will; all we can do is to trust Him. Try to bear it bravely, Naomi, for, believe me, God knows best."

He lay back exhausted, and was soon asleep. When he awoke Naomi was still by his side.

"Sing something, Naomi; sing our old favorite, 'He Leadeth Me.' "

"How can I sing 'content whatever lot I see?' I would not be content with the lot that now seems before me."

"For my sake," he whispered.

For his sake—what would she not do for his sake.

He smiled his appreciation as she sang the familiar words, and clasped the little hand closer which he held within his own. It was with a trembling voice that she began the last verse:

"And when my task on earth is done,
When, by thy grace, the victory's won,
E'en death's cold wave I will not—"

His hand fell from hers; his lips moved; she stooped to catch the whispered word,

"Farewell!"

"George!" she cried, but he did not answer.

"Alone! O God, be merciful, and take me too!" she moaned, as she knelt in tearless anguish beside the lifeless form. Mrs. Lawrence, coming to the door some moments later saw at a glance that George Raymond was dead. Going to the prostrate girl she knelt beside her, but started back in horror. "They are both dead!" she cried as she ran for help. Going into the hall she ran against Doctor Lee who had just entered.

"Her heart still beats," said the doctor, as he examined Naomi; "but she must not open her eyes on this scene."

He carried her to another room. Janet was sent for, and it was her scream as she entered the doorway and saw Naomi apparently lifeless that brought her back to life, but not to consciousness.

The news of George Raymond's death spread rapidly. A few who had not heard of his illness or death came to the church for the wedding, and sorrowful indeed were their hearts as they turned their steps homeward. When they learned of his death and Naomi's condition, their grief was pitiful to see. They laid all that was mortal of George Raymond to rest in the old churchyard, and Naomi tossed her weary head on the pillow unconscious of it all.

Weary weeks followed; sometimes it seemed that

death would surely claim her for his own. Janet was her faithful nurse through it all.

"There must surely be a change today," the doctor said one day late in February. "Watch her closely, and if I am needed send for me at once."

Janet kept a faithful vigil at the bedside all day long. The restless sufferer tossed wearily but in the evening sank into a quiet sleep.

"Janet."

At the sound of Naomi's voice Janet was by the bedside, and saw by her look that reason had returned.

"What is it, Naomi?" she asked, bending over her.

"Where am I? What has happened? Have I been ill?" she asked, looking at the pale, thin hand which lay before her.

"Yes, Naomi, you have been ill."

"Where is George? I want to see him."

Janet was bewildered. How should she answer her?

"It is night now; cannot you go to sleep again? You must not talk tonight."

Naomi soon slept, and Janet pondered how she should answer her when she awakened. She decided to consult Doctor Lee.

"She must not be kept in suspense. We must tell her all and trust to a merciful God for results," was Doctor Lee's advice.

"Janet, I have had such a dreadful dream: I dreamed it was George who was sick and that I was singing at his bedside. And—O! it was awful! I thought he died. Where is he now? Tell him to come to me."

The tears started in Janet's eyes. "Naomi your dream was not a mere dream. George cannot come to you."

"Cannot come? Then you mean he is dead! George dead! Yes, I remember it all now. But I thought I was dying too, and I am still alive. Janet, it was cruel of you to nurse me back to life when I have nothing to live for."

The words cut deep into Janet's sensitive soul, but they were forgiven as soon as uttered. Naomi did not weep, but from that day scarcely a word passed her lips. Strength came to her slowly. Friends came and tried many ways to interest her again in life, but all alike failed to arouse her from the lethargy into which she had fallen. She answered their questions in monosyllables, and listened without comment to their conversation.

Thus it went on; and the doctor shook his head sadly, and said:

"I fear for her mind. It might have been better had she died."

VIII

It was a bright, warm day in May. Naomi was alone, seated in an easy chair on the front veranda. She was to go home the next lay. Janet was busy preparing the long neglected home for her coming.

Finding herself alone, she procured a parasol which some one had left near, and, using it to lean upon, slowly she made her way toward the churchyard. No gravestone yet marked the resting place of George Raymond, but no need of that to tell Naomi which grave was his.

"Why did I not die!" she exclaimed, as she stood beside the grave over which the grass was already growing. Turning, she caught a glimpse of her mother's grave.

"O! my mother! Why were you taken from me when I need you so!" she cried, as she started toward it. Suddenly, like a voice from heaven the words of her mother came to her:

"He will not always lead you in pleasant paths; it will some times be by the troubled seas. Trials are sure to come, but if you'll only trust Him He'll lead you at last by the still waters." "Trust Him—trust Him"—she repeated. Her knees trembled, and she

would have fallen had it not been for the friendly support of her mother's gravestone.

"Father, forgive me!" she cried, as she knelt beside the loved spot; and the tears which had so long refused to flow came to her relief. When she arose it was to catch a glimpse of her home across the road. She smiled. "I believe I can do it," she said, as she turned to retrace her steps to the house.

"How are you getting along? Do you want to come in now?" It was Mrs. Lawrence's cheery voice as she came to the door to take a look at Naomi.

"I'm feeling better, so much better in fact, that I believe I'll take tea with Janet this evening and not wait till tomorrow."

"It would be a pleasant surprise for her. If you wish it Mr. Lawrence will take you over in the carriage."

"I think I can walk if you'll only help me a little."

It was a pitiful sight to see Naomi, once so blithe and supple, leaning on another for support. She was more cheerful, however, than she had been since she awoke from her long unconsciousness, and when Mrs. Lawrence saw traces of tears in her eyes, she knew that the burdened heart felt lighter. They walked slowly, and when they reached the door Mrs. Lawrence left her to go in alone. She went through to the kitchen door. Janet was busy and did not notice her.

"Have you no welcome for me, Janet?"

Janet started at the sound of Naomi's voice.

"Welcome, Naomi? A thousand welcomes!" she said, as she clasped her in her arms.

She took her in the cozy parlor and left her resting on the couch while she went back to her work in the kitchen. Some moments later, hearing the piano, she went to the door. A low, sweet voice was softly singing:

"Lord, I would clasp thy hand in mine,
Nor ever murmur nor repine,
Content, whatever lot I see,
Since 'tis my God that leadeth me."

"She has at last found that peace which passeth understanding," said Janet, as she brushed the tears from her eyes with the corner of her apron, and went back to her work of preparing some of Naomi's favorite dishes for the evening meal.

"How good it is to see her smile once more. She seems quite cheerful; I wonder what has changed her so. Poor girl! she has seen a lot of trouble for one so young. But I suppose, somehow, it must be for the best. God's ways are sometimes hard to understand though. Why couldn't it have been poor, old Mrs. Gibson, who has been longing for heaven for years, instead of George Raymond."

Thus she mused till John came.

"Have we company?" he asked, as he noted with what particular pains she had laid the table, and also that plates were laid for three instead of two.

"Naomi has come home," she answered, her face beaming with smiles.

From that day Naomi rapidly grew stronger. The new pastor came and took up the work so suddenly interrupted by George Raymond's death. He found in Naomi a great helper. Ere the close of the summer Naomi seemed her old self once more, except for a certain look of sadness which never for a moment left her face. It had in it though sweet resignation. The rebellious feeling which had kept her bound so long departed that day at her mother's grave, and submission had taken its place.

IX

"Janet, I have been thinking it all over, and I believe I will go back to Boston. I know my old music teacher will help me in procuring some pupils, and possibly after a while, when my income will permit, I can study under him again."

"But why must you leave us, Naomi? We will miss you so if you go away again."

"I must go because I am young, with possibly a long life before me. I am a poor girl, Janet, and must make my own living."

"But this home is yours, Naomi; and as long as we have a crust we will share it gladly with you."

"Yes, this home is mine—dear old home, how I love it! I know you would share your last crust with me, but I am young and strong, and must not eat the bread of idleness any longer."

"Of course I would not hinder your going, but I do hate to see you go. We will all miss you so."

"Not more than I will miss all of you. But I will come back often to see you. Janet, I have never asked your forgiveness for those wicked words I said to you last spring. You know I told you it was cruel of you to nurse me back to life when I had nothing to live for."

"They were forgiven long ago; let us forget them."

"It was hard at first; and for a long time I questioned God's mercy in letting me live, but that is all over now. He has spared my life, I know not what for, but I am going to trust Him and do the best I can."

Janet offered no further objection, but it was with a sad heart that she went about making preparations for Naomi's departure. It was on a crisp, October morning that Naomi climbed into the great wagon beside her loved piano and once again started for Boston.

No sooner had she arrived than she set about to find a home for herself. The Claytons were gone, so she had to look to strangers for a home. The place she selected was a modest lodging house, in not a very aristocratic part of the city, but nevertheless quite a respectable looking place. The landlady, Mrs. Hartwell, had an air of refinement about her which spoke of a different life from the one which she now lived. There were two bright, promising boys, aged fourteen and twelve. Of Mr. Hartwell Naomi saw little; and she also noticed that little was said of him in the conversations she had with the family.

Naomi's rooms were plainly but neatly furnished, and when the piano had been placed in position, and some bits of fancy work which Naomi had brought

from home had been added here and there, they presented quite a homelike appearance. When everything was arranged to suit her fancy she went in search of her former teacher to solicit his aid in procuring pupils. Many would have done this first, but not so with Naomi. She had started out to succeed.

Her old teacher welcomed her cordially, and assured her of his assistance.

"You will resume your lessons again, Miss Wentworth, will you not?" he asked.

"Not now; but maybe, sometime."

"Anyway you will take your old place in the choir," he insisted; and she promised she would.

X

The days' work was ended, and Naomi was spending the quiet evening at the piano when a low knock sounded at her door. She opened it to find Ormonde, the eldest son of Mrs. Hartwell.

"May I come in, please? I like to hear you sing."

"Do you like music?" she asked, her face brightening with a happy thought.

"Indeed, I do."

"Would you like to come each evening and let me teach you?"

His eyes opened wide.

"Wouldn't I though! That would be jolly."

"All right; suppose you go ask your mother what she thinks of it."

With a bound he was through the door and was soon at his mother's side. A few moments later she came to Naomi's room.

"Ormonde has been telling me about your offer. You know we are poor and cannot afford to pay much."

"I do not want pay; it will be a great pleasure to me if he enjoys it."

"It is good of you. It will be such a pleasure to me if my child can learn music. I used to be a good musician myself, but that was a long time ago," she said, as tears gathered in her eyes. "O! Miss Wentworth! sometimes it seems that my heart will surely break. My life was not always as it is now. You no doubt have seen that our home is not a happy one. I was once the indulged and petted child of fond parents; but when I married against their will all was changed. They would take me back even now if I would leave my husband, but I cannot give him up. He is good when he is himself, but he loves the cup and the game, and everything he earns goes to them. I fear every day to hear that he has lost his place at the bank, but maybe it would be a good thing if he did. But what must you think of me for telling you all this? My heart was so full that it just seemed that I must tell someone."

"Your lot is indeed a sad one," Naomi said, as she placed her arm tenderly about the quivering form of Mrs. Hartwell.

"Let us take it to God in prayer, and leave it all with Him."

Together they knelt, and Naomi lifted her voice in prayer:

"Father, I know in whom I have put my trust. Thou knowest for what we would pray tonight. O, God, grant that joy may soon come to this household

over which the clouds now hang so darkly. We ask it for Jesus' sake, Amen."

"Mrs. Hartwell, I want you to play and sing some of the songs you used to long ago," Naomi said, when they arose from their knees.

"Me play and sing? Why I haven't tried it for years," and she smiled at the very thought.

"Try it now, wont you, please?" Mrs. Hartwell went to the piano and for some moments her fingers moved hesitatingly over the keys. A familiar chord was struck, her fingers no longer hesitated, and her voice broke forth, not as clear, perhaps, as it once was, but yet with melody in it.

"That was Jack's favorite," she said, as she arose from the piano.

"It must be getting late; Jack will be here presently, so I must go now. I will not forget this evening; I will still hope and pray," she said, a smile brightening her face as she said good night.

XI

It was nine o'clock the next evening. The boys had just retired when Mrs. Hartwell heard familiar footsteps in the hallway. The door opened and her husband entered.

"Mary," he said, going to where she sat and kneeling at her feet, "I have come to ask your forgiveness for all my wrongdoings of the past; henceforth I am going to be a man."

"O, Jack! is it true?"

"Yes; I heard that prayer last night, Mary, and I am going to help God answer it. When you sang that song—that old favorite of mine—how I longed to rush in and take you in my arms, just as I used to do. I'll tell you, Mary, I never saw myself so plainly as I did last night when I stood at that door listening. What a brute I have been. Can you ever forgive me, Mary?"

"Forgive? O, Jack! how can you ask that when my happiness is so great?"

"You have been a good, true wife to me, Mary, and, God helping me, I'll be better to you hereafter," he said, as he folded her to his bosom.

"And it all came about through Miss Wentworth; how can I ever thank her?"

"She would say the praise belongs to God; and it does, Jack, yes, it does."

"Then let us give it to him. I have never been a praying man, as you know, Mary, but I have been trying to pray today, and if you'll kneel here by my side we will thank God together for this.

"O, God," he prayed, "we thank Thee for what Thou hast done for us this day. Only give me strength to hold out, and Thy name shall have the praise forever and ever, Amen."

Jack did hold out, and a short, happy year soon passed away.

"I have such good news for you, Naomi!" exclaimed Mrs. Hartwell one morning as she met Naomi in the hall. "Jack has bought a home for us. He took me to see it this morning."

"That is indeed good news. But"—and her face clouded a little—"must I leave you when you go to your new home?"

"You leave us! Haven't you learned yet that you are one of us? I want you to go with me tomorrow to select your rooms."

Naomi was as eager as a schoolgirl for the time to come when she was to go with Mrs. Hartwell to their new home, and chatted gaily during the long drive they had before reaching it.

"Why this is where the Claytons used to live!"

she exclaimed, as she gazed at the house before which they alighted.

"Yes; Jack bought it of his agent. Did you know them?"

"I lived with them when I was in Boston before."

Naomi was not long in selecting her rooms. For her bedroom she chose the one that she had before; and for her music room what had formerly been the nursery.

"Only three years since I left this house, but what changes that short time has wrought," she mused, as she wandered through the once familiar rooms.

They moved one week later, and the first night, long after the others had sought their beds, Naomi sat at her window looking out into the night. A spirit of restlessness was upon her, sleep was far away. She arose from the window and paced nervously to and fro. Picking up a shawl which lay near, she threw it lightly over her shoulders and went noiselessly down the stairway and out into the grounds, not stopping till she reached the lilac bushes. They were again in full bloom, and the same rustic seat which was there when she left was there still. Seated in that familiar spot, was it any wonder that the past came so vividly before her?

Arthur Bevington was again at her feet. How plainly could she hear the words, "You do love me,

Naomi, you cannot deny it!'' She could almost feel his warm kiss upon her hand, and the gentle breeze seemed to whisper the words, ''Farewell, my only love.''

Why had she felt as she did when she saw him leaving her? For a moment her heart almost stopped beating.

Ah! Naomi, have you learned at last that your woman's love was given to Arthur Bevington, and that it was only the love of friend for friend which you felt for George Raymond?

Yes, she realized it now.

''But would I do differently could I live it over again?'' she asked herself. As the face of George Raymond rose before her she cried, ''No, George, I'm glad I did not know! I would suffer all my life rather than deny you the happiness of your last few months on earth. As for Arthur he is young and no doubt has forgotten all about it long ere this. '' Looking up into the heavens she whispered,

''Content, whatever lot I see,
Since 'tis my God that leadeth me.''

A peace and quietness came over her. She went back to her room and was soon asleep. Perhaps it was with a heavier heart that she took up life's duties next morning, but her smile was none the less cheerful, and the world guessed not the secret which lay hidden in the inmost recesses of her soul.

XII

Five more years passed away. G— church was filled to overflowing. A returned missionary was to speak that night. The great organ pealed forth and Naomi's voice began that familiar hymn, "He Leadeth Me." Those watching the missionary at that moment saw him start and turn pale. He soon regained his composure, however, and listened attentively throughout the remainder of the singing. Naomi sang as she had never sung before. Those who heard her week after week marveled at the wonderful pathos in her voice. She seemed lost to all that was earthly, and as she sang the words,

"Lord, I would clasp Thy hand in mine,
Nor ever murmur nor repine,
Content, whatever lot I see,
Since 'tis my God that leadeth me,"

it was as though she were face to face with her God.

As the last note died away the missionary arose and said:

"Dear friends, before I speak to you of India I must say a word about the hymn we have just heard sung. Those of you who knew me before I went away

know what I was. I need not dwell on that. Just before I went away one of God's good angels with which he sometimes blesses the earth, sang that hymn to me; and from that time on, go where I would, do what I would, I could not get rid of the words. I knew that God had led the singer, and at last, in desperation, I fell on my knees and asked God to lead me too. From that day to this He has been leading me. I did not need to ask God what he would have me to do. I had but to look around me to see the great work there was to be done in India. I went to work; but friends, if I have been the means of doing any good in India, remember it is all because one woman followed where God led her."

He spoke at length on India and her great need, and many hearts and purses which had hitherto been closed to missions were opened wide that night. When the meeting was over friends crowded about him, and Naomi slipped quietly away.

The next day when Arthur Bevington called at the bank to see Jack Hartwell and received a cordial invitation to dine with them that evening, he accepted, little thinking what was in store for him.

"Finding things so different with you is a surprise I had not anticipated, Jack," said Arthur, as they were discussing old times after his arrival in the evening.

"Do you remember our parting words? I have often regretted them."

"Yes, I remember I said something to you about drinking so much, and you told me to mind my own business, that you could take care of yourself or something of the sort."

"But things are different with both of us now. Tell me how it all came about?"

"Well, it all came about through one of God's good angels with which he sometimes blesses the earth, as you said last night. You can understand it better when you have seen her. Go and fetch her, wife; she must sing for us before dinner."

Mrs. Hartwell left the room and soon returned with Naomi..

"Miss Wentworth, this is an old friend of mine, Mr. Bevington," Mr. Hartwell said by way of introduction. Their eyes met. "I have met your friend before. Welcome home, Mr. Bevington," she added, as she gave him her hand in greeting.

"I'm sorry, but I have a business engagement down town which I must keep, but I will not be gone long," Mr. Hartwell said when dinner was over.

"You might show him the grounds by moonlight, Naomi, while I am away."

They followed him to the gate, and, turning from it instinctively they went toward the lilac bushes.

Neither spoke till they reached them. It was Arthur who broke the silence.

"Naomi—Miss Wentworth, tell me why it is that you are still Miss Wentworth, and not Mrs. Raymond?"

"God willed it so," was all she said.

"Then God has willed that you shall be my wife! Do not turn me away from you again, Naomi, for I love you still, just as I have always loved you since I first saw you in the old church. Answer me, Naomi, what is to be my fate?"

"I love you, Arthur, and I will be your wife."

The wedding day was set for June. Naomi went to spend the intervening weeks at the old home with Janet, and much of Arthur's time was spent there also.

"Would you like this to always be your home?" he asked her one evening as they were seated on the rose-covered veranda.

"Yes, I would like it; I will not deny that. Were I choosing my own lot it would be to spend the rest of my life here at my old home among my friends. But if God calls me to India do not think that I am unwilling to go."

"It seems that he is calling us here just now. Brother Ford, as you know, is going away this fall in the hope of finding improved health in a milder climate. They have asked me to take his place. I

verily believe it is because they hate to give you up, and they think the only way to keep you is to take me too."

"They do love me; I never realized it before as I have in these last few weeks. But wait till they know you and we'll see whether they want you for my sake or not."

When Arthur asked Naomi where she wanted to go for a wedding trip, she replied:

"I know it is asking a great deal, but I should like so much to go to Italy."

"You seem to forget, Naomi, that I am not a poor man. If you wish it we will go to Italy. We have the whole summer before us as Mr. Ford does not leave until Autumn."

They were married in the church in the presence of but a few of their friends, and the next day started on their trip abroad.

XIII

"Well, well, this is indeed luck!" exclaimed a voice as Arthur felt a hand laid on his shoulder. "And here is our little Naomi. You need not tell me your story, your happy faces tell me that," he said, as Arthur attempted to speak. It was Mr. Clayton. "You must come right home with me; wont it be a surprise to wife and Beatrice though."

Arthur and Naomi had reached Florence, Italy, in their travels, when they met Mr. Clayton.

"I'm so glad you have come just at this time," Beatrice said to Naomi, when the first warm greetings were over. "I'm going to be married next week to Sir Francis Clarendon. He will be here this evening."

Evening came, and with it Sir Francis. As he and Arthur came face to face a look of recognition passed between them.

"Thief! Murderer! So you have come to rob this home of its treasure, have you, as you once robbed me of mine!" exclaimed Arthur.

"Man! what do you mean?" It was Beatrice who spoke.

"I mean that some years ago when I was in India I knew this man as Frank Claren. I trusted him as a friend and was rewarded by being robbed and left

for dead, as he thought, by his hand. Not only did he rob me of my money but also of a painting which I prized highly." Naomi shuddered as she heard the story for the first time from her husband's lips.

"Prove your words! Defend yourself, Francis; tell him he lies!" exclaimed Beatrice. He was silent.

"You do not speak—*you are guilty!* Take your ring, leave me, and never let me look upon your face again!" she cried, as she threw a sparkling gem at his feet. He stooped to pick it up.

"But stop! you shall not have it but to place it upon the hand of another of your victims. I shall wear it to remind me—well, to remind me that 'all is not gold that glitters.' If ever again I am tempted to believe in man, one look at that ring will rid me of the delusion. I vow this night never again to love! Hear me all of you, and hear me God!"

She stooped to get the ring and placed it again on her finger as though to seal her vow.

"If ever again with your cursed allurements you beguile an innocent girl into loving you, may the Lord deal with you as you deserve.

"Go!" she cried, pointing to the door.

He went; and little did either dream under what circumstances they were destined to meet again.

"You spoke of a painting; come with me,"

Beatrice said, turning to Arthur and Naomi after he had gone. She led the way to her room upstairs.

"Is this it?" she asked, producing a painting from among some other presents which had been sent her. "Yes;" answered Arthur, as he eagerly gazed once more upon the picture of Naomi as she stood upon the old church steps just as he had seen her that first evening so long ago.

"I painted it from memory, Naomi. I have tried time and again to reproduce it since it was taken, but all efforts have failed."

"Your memory served you well. How well I remember that night. As I stood there watching that great, black cloud, I thought of the clouds that hung over some people's lives, and wondered if any would ever come into mine. Before the dawn of another day a cloud had appeared which was so black that I could not see through it for a long time. As I look back now I can see how selfish I was in my sorrow. She was homesick; God only took her home."

"The picture is yours; take it," Beatrice said, when Naomi had ceased speaking.

"Naomi, you must take me back to America with you. I shall never like Italy again."

"May I?" asked Naomi, looking at Mrs. Clayton.

It was arranged that Beatrice should go back with them, and as soon as Mr. Clayton could arrange his

business affairs he and Mrs. Clayton would follow. It was late in September when they reached home. Mr. Ford was ready to start for the South so Arthur and Naomi took up their abode in the parsonage at once. They sent Ormonde Hartwell an urgent invitation to spend the Christmas holidays with them which he accepted.

XIV

"You know my story Ormonde, you know I cannot love you, so why do you persist in tormenting me?"

"I know your story, but I do not know that you cannot love me. Forget your foolish vow, Beatrice, be my wife, and let us be happy together."

"I cannot forget it yet, but I will make you this proposition: Promise me that you will not speak to me of love for one year. I have worn this ring to remind me of the past. I will give it to you to remind you of your promise, and I will try to forget the past. Do you agree?" she asked, holding the ring up to place it upon his hand.

"I will abide by your decision; but it is a hard sentence," he replied, as he received the emblem of his silence and left her alone.

"Rid of his foolishness for one whole year; that is, if he keeps his promise," she thought, a bitter smile playing about her mouth.

Ormonde returned to Boston the next day.

Some weeks later Mr. and Mrs. Clayton arrived and Beatrice bade farewell to the cottage by the church. She and Ormonde often met at social func-

tions, but no word of love passed his lips, and he never trusted himself to call. Thus the first half year went by, when, one morning Beatrice was surprised by receiving a call from him.

"I have come to say goodbye for a short while, Beatrice, I start abroad tomorrow. Come with me, let us spend our honeymoon in fair, sunny Italy!" he cried, unable to control himself when once he found himself alone in her presence.

"Take me to Italy? Never! I hate it! If you have forgotten your promise, Mr. Hartwell, I have not forgotten the past," she answered haughtily, raising herself to her full height.

He left her, not daring to trust himself longer in her presence. Ormonde Hartwell was madly in love. Life so near the object of his love proved unendurable, as he was bound to silence regarding his love for her, so he decided to spend the remaining six months in travel and in the pursuit of his musical studies which he had kept up faithfully since Naomi gave him his first lessons.

Three weeks later, as Beatrice was reading the morning paper, her eye fell on these words:

"Wreckage of the steamer Kelton has been found off the coast of Corsica. All on board are believed to have perished as no trace of life could be found. The Kelton sailed from Boston three weeks ago, and had on board a number of Boston people."

"Ormonde Hartwell drowned—and—I love him!

Ormonde, my love, come back to me! I do love you Ormonde, I know it now. I knew it all the time but my stubborn heart would not admit it. And this is my punishment. O, God! how can I bear it!''

Restlessly she paced the floor for fully half an hour, then stopped suddenly and exclaimed: ''His mother! I must go to her.'' Hastily donning street attire she started, afoot, to the house she knew so well. As she stood waiting for admittance at the door which as a child she had opened at will, how she longed that she might blot out the intervening years, and be that happy child once more.

No sooner had the door been opened than she heard sobs, and, with the words, ''I want to see Mrs. Hartwell,'' she brushed past the servant and up the stairway from whence the sobs came. Hearing footsteps, Mrs. Hartwell looked up.

''You, Beatrice Clayton! Were it not for you my boy would be safe at home with me now. He told me the whole story. Why have you come to mock me at this hour?''

''I have not come to mock you. I have made a great mistake. I do not ask you to forgive me, but let me weep with you, for I, too, loved him.''

She took a step forward and knelt at Mrs. Hartwell's feet. The proud head bent lower and lower until it rested in Ormonde's mother's lap and their tears and sobs mingled together.

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XV

"A boat has been found by some fishermen near Genoa which is believed to have belonged to the lost vessel, Kelton. It contained the bodies of two dead men and one who is more dead than alive. He is being cared for by a fisherman at a little village near Genoa. As he is unconscious no clew to his identity can be learned."

"It might be Ormonde; I must go and find out."

When Beatrice first mentioned the matter to her parents they objected; but her earnest entreaty caused them to see that she suffered more than she appeared to, so they at last gave their consent.

She took her faithful maid as a companion, and set out on her strange mission.

"His mother blames me for his death. If only I could restore him to her I would give my life even," were her almost parting words to her mother.

After what seemed to Beatrice an endless voyage, they landed at Genoa, and, after making many inquiries at last found the village and house where the stranger was being cared for. Beatrice, being well acquainted with the Italian tongue, had no trouble in making known her mission. She found the man still in an unconscious condition, hovering between life and death. In vain she looked for some resemblance

to her lost lover, but could find nothing to give her hope. She looked at his hand but no ring was there. He was greatly emaciated and his hair was partly gray.

"Was his hair like it is now, when you found him?" she asked of the fisherman.

"No; it was long. We cut it after we brought him here."

"I mean, was it gray?"

"Yes; what he went through with is enough to turn any man's hair gray."

"Can you describe the other men who were in the boat?"

"One of them was an old man and the other one was a mere boy."

"I do not believe this is my friend, but I see you are worn out with caring for him, so I will stay and help you. Let me know of anything you need for his comfort and I will get it."

"Thank you, ma'am, thank you. It has been a little hard on me and Crissie, as we are all alone, but the neighbors have been kind."

Crissie, the other occupant of the cottage, was the fisherman's twelve-year-old daughter and housekeeper.

"We are stopping at the hotel some distance up this street. I will go now, but will come this evening to watch with him while you get a good night's rest."

When Beatrice returned to the cottage she took with her a physician.

"Its a serious case; but maybe we'll pull him through," was all the encouragement he gave her. The fisherman had had a physician, but he pronounced it a hopeless case, and, not being assured of his pay, had left a supply of medicine and had not bothered further about it.

Days grew into weeks and still he lingered on. Beatrice had given up all hope that this man might be Ormonde, but she still stayed, hoping he might regain consciousness and could give her some word from Ormonde.

It was almost midnight. Beatrice was watching alone by the sickbed and a howling storm was raging without. Blinding flashes of lightning came alternately with terrific peals of thunder which shook the very earth.

"The ship goes down! My God! must I die before I tell my darling how dear she is to me?" cried the man, raising himself in bed. "O Beatrice! Beatrice! why did you send me from you when I love you so?"

"Ormonde, your Beatrice is here!" she cried, falling on her knees at the bedside. But he only stared at her and continued his mad wailing. As the storm subsided he grew quieter, and toward morning sank into a peaceful sleep.

XVI

"May I break my promise now, Beatrice?"

"You need not break your promise, Ormonde. Can you love me still, after all that I have done, and will you be my husband?" she asked, a merry twinkle in her eyes.

"Since I am so completely in your power, I suppose I will not dare refuse," he answered laughing. "But as the reminder of my promise is gone, I think I am not bound to silence any longer."

They were married in the little cottage by the sea, and spent their honeymoon in Italy.

"See what I found! Is it yours?" Crissie asked, holding something up before Beatrice.

Beatrice took it to find that it was the lost ring.

"It was ours, but it is yours now, Crissie. We have no further use for it," she said, handing it back to the child. It was many years afterward that Crissie learned the great value of the ring given her that day.

As soon as Ormonde was strong enough they went to Genoa, and from there slowly made their way toward London, stopping often that he might rest and gain strength. When they reached London he was beginning to look like himself once more, except that his hair was gray.

One morning as they were out walking in London they came near a church out of which a crowd was coming.

"A wedding, I believe. Yes, there is the bride and groom and—he is Francis Clarenden! Is it too late to save her?" Beatrice cried, running forward.

Noticing the commotion the groom looked around. His eye fell on Beatrice, he staggered, and fell back—dead.

The evening papers came out with the pitiful story of "A Bride and a Widow within an hour," and when Beatrice read it she said, "I did not think when I asked God to deal justly with him that I would see His justice meted out."

The voyage was almost over. Boston was in sight. Many loving hearts were waiting to welcome them home.

"My son! My son!" exclaimed Mrs. Hartwell, as she was clasped to Ormonde's bosom.

"And your daughter also, mother," he said, releasing her that Beatrice might receive her share of the welcome.

"My children," whispered Naomi, as, a few weeks later she welcomed them to the little cottage by the church.

Years have passed. It is Junetime. Two forms are again standing on the old church steps watching the sunset. Silence reigns, each being occupied with

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thought too deep for expression. Presently the stillness is broken, and, softly floating on the evening air we hear again the words:

"Sometimes 'mid scenes of deepest gloom,
Sometimes where Eden's bowers bloom,
By waters still, o'er troubled sea—
Still 'tis His hand that leadeth me."

"He is leading us by the still waters now, Naomi," said Arthur, turning toward the singer.

And she, looking with trustful eyes into her husband's face, echoed the words.

The End.

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